
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

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Finding:

Current regulations prohibit the use of machines to remove excessive fuels on slopes $\geq 30\%$, increasing implementation costs and emissions from burning and reducing biomass availability.

Background and Supporting Evidence:

Approximately 60% of the 110 CWPP projects have a significant component ($>20\%$) of land on slopes $\geq 30\%$. It is assumed projects proposed by other agencies will have similar components of steeper ground.

The only treatment allowed on these slopes is hand cutting and pile burning. Hand cutting is more expensive than whole tree yarding; hand cutting cannot remove trees >14 inches diameter-at-breast height, thus prescriptions are limited; no material is available for biomass; and because of the large material placed in piles they must cure for >24 months prior to burning. The long-term curing maintains a fuel hazard and the large material in the piles often generates substantial amounts of smoke.

Allowing machines on slopes $\geq 30\%$ should reduce implementation costs; treatments should remove sufficient material to ensure forest health is fully restored; material should be available for biomass; and emissions from burning in a biomass facility should be significantly reduced compared to pile burning.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) regulates operations on slopes greater than 30% in the Nevada portion of the Lake Tahoe Basin. TRPA and Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (Lahontan) regulate similar activities in the California portion.

Negotiations between Lahontan and the Forest Service for the Heavenly Creek SEZ demonstration project took 2.5 years.

Recommendations

TRPA should initiate a 3 year adaptive management program allowing machines on slopes $\geq 30\%$ in the Nevada portion of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

A 3 year time frame was selected to allow for as much variability in conditions as would be expected over the course of the 10-year planning horizon for currently proposed fuel reduction projects.

Treatment costs, amount of material available for biomass, and actual or calculated changes in emissions from not hand cutting and pile burning should be compared to those same metrics in California where those would be the only techniques available on slopes $\geq 30\%$.

Impacts on Implementation

Cost: Funding would be necessary to prepare either a site-specific or programmatic environmental document and to manage the adaptive management program.

Funding Source: Federal and state sources.

Staffing: Additional staff time would be required to prepare the environmental document, monitor and obtain metrics among selected projects, analyze those metrics, and prepare periodic reports.

Existing regulations or laws: The TRPA Code of Ordinances and the Water Quality Control Plan for the Lahontan Basin limit timber harvest activities in the Lake Tahoe Basin.